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Swiss Campaign to Ban Landmines: Gender and Mine Action Programme

by Matthew Voegel [Mine Action Information Center]

The Swiss Campaign to Ban Landmines' Gender and Mine Action Programme has worked to create a resource where mine-action organizations can find information and support for their endeavors to mainstream gender considerations in mine action. In this pursuit, the Swiss Campaign has created a gender portal and conducted a global research study.

On 31 October 2000, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. The resolution emphasized "the need for all parties to ensure that mine clearance and mine awareness programmes take into account the special needs of women and girls."¹ In the mine-action community, one organization that seems to have taken the gender issue as a main focus is the Swiss Campaign to Ban Landmines' Gender and Mine Action Programme.

The Swiss Campaign

The Swiss Campaign, which is a member of the well-known International Campaign to Ban Landmines, was formed in 1994. It is an umbrella organization consisting of 50 Swiss nongovernmental organizations dedicated to prohibiting the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of landmines and other indiscriminate weapons, such as cluster munitions. In December 2006, the Swiss Campaign initiated a new program which encourages gender mainstreaming in the field of mine action. The Swiss Campaign's Gender and Mine Action Programme is designed to enrich the efforts of the United Nations in gender mainstreaming mine action.²

The Gender and Mine Action Programme

According to its Web site, the Gender and Mine Action Programme has four broad objectives to fulfill:

1. Conduct research and evaluate the different effects of mines and mine-action policies on both men and women.
2. Produce a free publication to showcase research results.
3. Appeal to governments and make sure to stress the importance of gender in mine action and to take it into consideration when programming and funding mine action.
4. Support women-based organizations that are lobbying for proper, national mine-action programs in countries that have not yet acceded to the Mine Ban Treaty.³

According to Marie Nilsson, Gender Programme Officer for the Swiss Campaign, the program has been divided into two phases. The first phase, completed in April 2008, consisted of launching a Web portal, gathering field research on gender and mine action, and producing the publication *Gender and Landmines—from Concept to Practice*. The



second phase ends in May 2009 and is funded by the government of Norway and the Canadian International Development Agency.⁴ This second phase aims to "empower and build the capacity of women's organizations active in mine affected locations"⁵ while continuing to "advocate to governments, as donors and programmers of mine action, on the importance and the effectiveness of including a gender perspective in policy-making, programming and funding of mine action."⁵

On 8 March 2007, a day generally recognized as International Women's Day, the Swiss Campaign distributed a survey on gender and mine action to the international community. The sweeping scope of this research sought to gain in-depth information on the gendered effects of mines as well as the relationships between gender and mine-action programs/policies.¹ The survey focused on international mine-action as well as local nongovernmental organizations in mine-affected territories, relevant government ministries, mine-action donors, U.N. agencies and women's grassroots organizations.

In May 2007, the program launched its own Web site and research database known as the Gender and Mine Action Portal.² The site contains a library of different documents, reports, maps, links to information resources and survivor stories. It also includes an online discussion forum that allows mine-action actors to communicate with one another and an entire network that allows mine-action practitioners and those facilitating gender mainstreaming to share information. "The Web portal has been welcomed by the community as a source of information for various actors; mine-action specialists, gender experts, students and researchers," says Nilsson. She notes that the Web site is not updated as frequently as desired, but the portal was completely revamped in November 2008.⁴

From Concept to Practice

For Nilsson, the program's most influential projects have been the production and distribution of *Gender and Landmines—from Concept to Practice*. The publication, released in May 2008, was the culmination of intense research that consisted of 80 personal interviews and input

from 66 different organizations. It was released with support from the Swiss government and was published in English, French and Spanish. It investigates "the significance of gender in the impact and the effectiveness of mine action" and gives readers an "overview, together with concrete examples, on how gender can be mainstreamed in mine action."⁵ The publication itself is made up of four parts. The first section introduces the reader to the issue of gender within mine action and why it is important. The second section profiles five different mine-affected countries (Colombia, Lebanon, Mozambique, Sri Lanka and Sudan) in which the concept of gender mainstreaming is examined and practiced. The third section discusses gender in relation to the four selected pillars of mine action, specifically demining, mine-risk education, victim assistance and advocacy. The fourth section provides an overall conclusion and some suggestions for further research on the subject.

The third section also discusses "good practices" of gender mainstreaming throughout the globe using real-life examples. Within each of these segments, personal anecdotes and quotes from both men and women within the mine-action community allow readers to put the rhetoric behind gender mainstream-

ing into context. Focusing their message on "policy makers, programmers, donors and implementing organizations,"¹ the researchers made recommendations to help gender mainstreaming throughout the mine-action sector, focusing on their goal to reach a common perspective on the gender issue.

According to Nilsson, the report gained much interest within the mine-action community and has been mostly well-received. In fact, in June 2008, the Swiss Campaign was invited to the Meeting of the Standing Committees of the *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction*⁶ to give an update on the issue of gender and to participate in a panel on how to link mine action and development.⁴ However, Nilsson mentions that, as with any controversial subject, there are those who doubt the importance of the gender issue. "Some label it as irrelevant or unnecessary, a Western academic add-on perspective," she says.⁷ In spite of this, Nilsson seems optimistic as she discusses the future of the program: "Future plans are undecided, but we have developed a new project proposal for continuation after May 2009"⁷ and the Swiss Campaign is currently seeking new funding. ♦

See Endnotes, page 113



Matthew Voegel has been working as an Editorial Assistant for *The Journal of ERW and Mine Action* since October 2006. He is currently a student at James Madison University pursuing a Bachelor of Arts at the School of Media Arts and Design in print journalism. He is also pursuing minors in both Spanish and Middle Eastern communities and migrations. He plans to graduate from JMU in May 2009.

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News Brief

HDI Partnership with Business School to Help UXO Survivors in Vietnam

The Humpty Dumpty Institute announced a partnership with Columbia University Business School's executive education division, which will assist HDI with a development project for unexploded-ordnance survivors in Vietnam. This partnership is part of the business school's new "Positive Impact Project," in which students of the Columbia Senior Executive Program generate meaningful international projects for the nonprofit sector. This year, the CSEP class will concentrate its energies on revamping HDI's business/marketing plan for its "Mushrooms with a Mission" program, which aims to assist UXO survivors in Vietnam's most contaminated region, the Quang Tri province.

Mushrooms with a Mission trains survivors in growing mushrooms and helps survivors collectively sell their products to a processing facility. The mushrooms are then promoted, packaged and sold to local and regional markets in Asia. A portion of the proceeds is donated to UXO-removal projects, and the project doubles the annual income of participating farmers in the Quang Tri province.